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SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA: JOINT REGIONAL MILITARY
OPERATIONS AGAINST LRA CAMPS LAUNCHED

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On December 14, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and southern Sudan launched joint military operations against Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) camps in eastern DRC. Ugandan Defense spokesmen said airstrikes hit five LRA camps. Operations are continuing. Cooperation between the governments and militaries of Uganda, DRC, and southern Sudan has been strong. Ugandan Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa told the diplomatic corps that the military operations were not an end to the peace process, but that the application of military pressure was necessary to change the negative dynamic. He said that operations would continue until the LRA assembles at Rikwangba. Government of Southern Sudan Chief Mediator Riek Machar also called on the LRA to assemble at Rikwangba. Public reaction in Uganda has generally been supportive, with a few opposition parliamentarians criticizing the attacks. End Summary.

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REGIONAL OPERATION ANNOUNCED
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¶2. (SBU) Joint operations against the LRA were announced in a statement signed by Chiefs of Military Intelligence BG James Mugira (Uganda), BG Deodenne Kitenge (DRC), and BG Mutual Majok (SPLA) on December 14. The verbatim text of the release is as follows: "The Armed Forces of Uganda (UPDF), DRC (FARDC), and Southern Sudan (SPLA) in a joint intelligence-led military operation this morning, the 14 Dec 2008 launched an attack on LRA hideouts of terrorist Joseph Kony in Garamba, Democratic Republic of Congo. The three Armed Forces successfully attacked the main body of bandits and destroyed the main camp of Kony codenamed Camp Swahili setting it on fire. Military operations against these terrorists are continuing and more details about the operation will be released as it progresses."

¶3. (SBU) Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa told the diplomatic corps on December 16 that the joint operations were not an end to the peace process, but a means to change the negative status quo and to demonstrate to Kony that the alternative to peace is worse. He stated that operations would continue until the LRA assembled at Rikwangba. Kutesa's position was echoed by Minister of Security Amama Mbabazi and Minister of State for Defense Ruth Nankabirwa, who briefed Parliament on the operation, and advised Kony that he would only be safe at Rikwangba. They urged the LRA to release the women and children it holds in captivity. The Juba Peace Process Chief Mediator, Government of Southern Sudan Vice President Riek Machar, also encouraged the LRA to assemble at Rikwangba and make immediate arrangements to sign the peace agreement in his report on the Status of the Juba Peace Process in the Light of Renewed Military Action.

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OPERATION ENTERING NEW PHASES
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¶4. (SBU) Major Chris Magezi, the UPDF's spokesman at operational headquarters, told reporters that phase one of the operation had ended and that the second phase of assault,

cordon, search, and destroy had begun. He also said that non-combatant women, children, and abductees will be rescued and received at camps set up for them. Six abductees had already been rescued; four were Congolese, one was Ugandan, and one was a pregnant young girl from Central African Republic (CAR). The UPDF dropped leaflets carrying messages of peace and opportunity and directing those fleeing the camps to surrender to any church, public institution, the UPDF, SPLA, MONUC, or Congolese military. Similar messages began transmission on local radio stations on December 16. The leaflets and radio broadcasts also gave the locations of reception centers.

15. (SBU) Magezi provided additional information about the joint nature of the operation. He stated that the SPLA was manning the northern axis of the area of operations, while the UPDF and Congolese army were defending the southern flank. MONUC pledged full support to the operation and its overall commander, General Boubacar Gaye, flew into Dungu on December 16 to coordinate MONUC assistance with the overall UPDF commander, Brigadier General Patrick Kankirho.

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PUBLIC REACTION, POSITIVELY MIXED
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16. (SBU) Public reaction in Uganda has been mixed, but broadly positive so far. Most Ugandans that expressed support for the action believe that Kony was not serious about the peace process. Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Morris Latigo, a northerner who had participated in some of the meetings with Kony, was vocal in his support

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for the operation. Gulu District Chairman Norbert Mao is adopting a wait-and-see attitude, but preparing for potential returns of abductees and/or population movements. Vocal government critics and Acholi members of the opposition, Reagan Okumu and Livingston Okello Okello, made emotionally-based, politically-motivated statements based on inaccurate information to include "We are vehemently opposed to joint military operations against the LRA because 99 percent of these rebels and their wives, not to mention the the children born in the bush, were abducted. It's a double crime for the state of Uganda to follow the abducted people and destroy them in the bush." Both parliamentarians described the operation as a "crime against humanity."

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COMMENT
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17. (SBU) Kony was not the only one surprised by this regional military action. Initial public reaction to the news of the operations on the LRA was also one of surprise, but has been generally positive. However, the slow pace of the operations has resulted in a lack of damage assessments, which the Ugandan media are anxiously awaiting. How the operation is viewed will ultimately be determined by what it achieves.

BROWNING